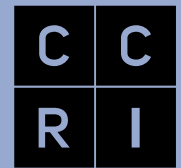


TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS SERIES

The Dynamic Nature of Transfer Partnerships: Catalysts and Barriers to Collaboration



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Institutional collaborations between community colleges and baccalaureate-degree granting universities are becoming an increasingly popular strategy to improve transfer and degree completion outcomes. Many promising cases of these collaborative efforts are described in the literature, and draw attention to some of their critical components. However, fewer resources are available to inform the process of developing transfer partnerships. This Data Note draws upon qualitative findings from the [High-Performing Transfer Partnerships \(HPTP\) study](#)¹ to explore many of the factors and conditions that can impact the creation and sustainability of transfer partnerships.

A DEVELOPMENTAL VIEW OF TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

In an earlier Data Note, we described the variety in types and levels of transfer partnerships that were observed in the HPTP study (Yeh & Wetzstein, 2018). Upon visiting these multiple institutional pairs, it also was clear that some institutions had been working together for many years, while others had only recently begun collaborating with each other. In numerous cases participants described an ebb and flow dynamic over time, in which their institutional relationship was created many years ago, had deteriorated for a number of years, and then had recently improved again. As we investigated these dynamic processes more closely, we discovered a number of factors that seem to either promote or prevent the progression of

collaborative efforts to the next level. In this current Data Note we highlight some of the elements that operate as catalysts and barriers to developing transfer partnerships.

To better understand the processes involved in developing and maintaining transfer partnerships, we utilized the multidimensional partnership development model developed by Amey and her colleagues as a lens through which to analyze our data (Amey, Eddy & Campbell, 2010; Amey, Eddy & Ozaki, 2007; Eddy, 2010). By examining various types of community college partnerships, including partnerships with universities, they created a developmental model that focuses on the stages involved in creating partnerships between community colleges and other educational institutions.

¹ The HPTP study focuses on institutional partnerships between community colleges and baccalaureate-degree granting universities that promote more equitable transfer outcomes for underserved student populations. The data set for this brief consists of interviews with 231 faculty, staff, and students at seven institutional pairs across three states. (For a detailed explanation of the High-Performing Transfer Partnership (HPTP) study, see Yeh, 2018).

In particular, Eddy's (2010) notion of "push-pull factors of partnerships" (p. 52) was highly pertinent to the findings in our study. Eddy adapted Lewin's (1951) model of force field analysis, which describes the forces impacting organizational change efforts, to illustrate forces that can operate for and against change within educational partnerships. Identifying and analyzing these push-pull factors can be instrumental to the formation, development, and sustainability of educational collaborations.

PUSH-PULL FACTORS THAT IMPACT TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Data from the institutional pairs that we studied uncovered numerous factors that impact the development of partnerships, several of which have been observed in previous research (Dolinsky, Rhodes & McCambly, 2016; Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Handel, 2011; Handel & Williams, 2012; Kisker, 2007; Miller, 2013; Wilson & Lowry, 2016). But more specifically, our findings suggest that the intersections of culture, policy and practice were the places that created the conditions that could complicate or stall partnerships from moving forward, or conversely, could support partnerships to grow and thrive. These three intersections took place between 1) culture and practice, 2) policy and practice, and 3) policy and culture.

Culture & Practice. For example, we found that the level of trust and respect between institutions and individuals was one aspect of institutional culture that impacted transfer-related practices such as communication, data sharing, and the ability to discuss and solve issues between campuses. When trust had been built or re-established over time between staff or faculty, we saw many instances of innovative and effective collaboration. But when people perceived a lack of respect from their counterparts at the partner institution, the resulting animosity inhibited their

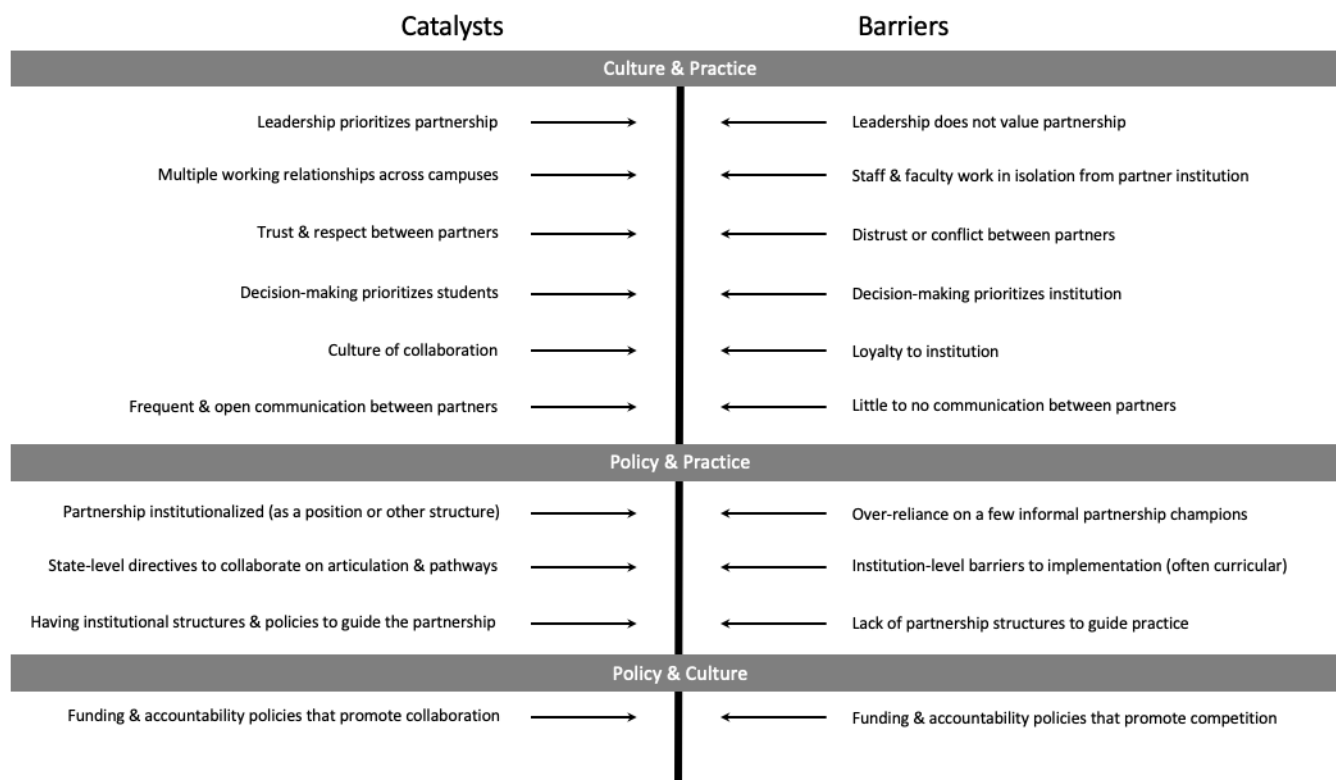
motivation and ability to work together.

Policy & Practice. State and institution-level policies also had an impact on practices that were pertinent to transfer partnerships. For instance, state articulation and pathways policies often stipulated certain requirements that could be difficult to implement in practice, because of specific departmental or curricular structures. As one community college faculty member described, "The bigger challenge to developing partnerships is the uniqueness of individual programs . . . finding the curricular matches and finding the competencies has been just a huge task for the department chair to make it work."

Policy & Culture. State-level accountability policies had a notable influence on institutional culture within transfer partnerships. Although state-level representatives strongly encouraged higher education institutions to partner with each other, funding structures often promoted a competitive culture between these same institutions. One staff person reflected: "It always comes down to money, right? All of our entities are reliant upon state subsidy and there is a financial model. If they created a financial model that rewarded partnerships, then I think that would entice people to be better partners."

The above examples provide a snapshot of the elements that impacted the transfer partnerships in our study. We used Eddy's model of partnership development, and particularly the concept of push-pull factors to look at the catalysts and barriers that we observed. The following diagram shows the push-pull factors that arose in our study, grouped into the three intersectional categories described above. The degree to which these factors were present at both institutions influenced the functioning and commitment level of the partnerships.

This framework can serve as a lens through which to better understand the institutional context of transfer



partnerships, and how a multitude of factors can both positively and negatively influence their evolution. Understanding the ways that culture, policy and practice interact with each other as organizational push-pull factors can enable practitioners to evaluate their own partnership contexts, better navigate complex relationships, and proactively steer their collaborative efforts. Analyzing their partnerships through these broader categories could also help administrators and policymakers who are interested in building and sustaining transfer partnerships to detect patterns in their current relationships, or identify areas where they could concentrate their efforts.

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Review the Transfer Partnerships Data Note series [here](#) or: <http://www.uw.edu/ccri/research/transfer/>

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